

Theater

Evening up the score

Politically daring, yes. Politically correct, no.

BY MARTY FUGATE
Arts and Entertainment Editor

British comedy is a strange mix of music hall naughtiness, verbal erudition and cross-dressing. It's also one of the United Kingdom's leading exports to our shores. The first wave of the British comedy invasion hit in the early 1960s, at about the same time as the British music invasion. Peter Cook and Dudley Moore were leading the charge.

Theater

'Good Evening'
Florida Studio Theatre
Reviewed July 8
Running through July 24

Working-class Moore was a brilliant pianist and composer; upper-class Cook was a satirical sharpshooter, and one of the founders of both a legendary comedy nightclub (The Establishment) and a legendary satirical magazine (Private Eye). They were part of the four-man comedy squad on the "Beyond the Fringe" revue, part of the comedy platoon on BBC TV's "That Was the Week that Was," and a duo on another show called "Not Only ... But

Also," which the BBC later erased. They continued to work as a duo and premiered this Tony Award-winning revue of their sketches on Broadway in 1973. Most Americans know them now for their movies.

These 15 sketches draw from the same ill will of comedy as the lads on "Monty Python's Flying Circus" later did.

There's the stubborn irrationality of the restaurateur in "The Frog and Peach," who opens a restaurant in a bog, serving only tadpole-stuffed peaches and frogs cooked with peaches in their mouths — serving these things but not selling them for 30 years — and finally admitting, to a talk show host, that, yes, perhaps it wasn't such a good idea. "Gospel Truth" is another glib interview — this time set in Bible days. A reporter from the Bethlehem Star does his best to get a few juicy quotes from a dim shepherd (named Shepherd) about what happened on the original Christmas morning.

"One Leg Too Few" features a one-legged actor auditioning for the part of Tarzan, and a casting agent who tells him not to give up hope; he's first in line — if no two-legged actors show up in the next 18 months.

Steven Barron plays Cook; Tony Freeman



Forrest MacDonald

Excessive self-importance as a form of self-deprecation — Tony Freeman and Steven Barron as Dudley Moore and Peter Cook

plays Moore. More accurately, Barron plays a Peter Cook type (usually an upper-class authority figure, occasionally a lout), and Freeman plays a Dudley Moore type (a hyperactive Hobbit).

Under Jim Helsing's direction, Barron and Freeman stay true to the characters Cook and Moore originally created in the bits — and keep the laughs coming.

The laughs include a good-sized helping of musical mirth — satiric compositions all penned by Moore. There's a twee spoof of Elizabethan madrigals and a bombastic piece from a mythical German opera called "Die Flabbergast." Pianist Jim Prosser also

does a hilarious rendition of the "Kwai Sonata" — a series of endless variations on the theme from "The Bridge on the River Kwai" that lumbers on and refuses to die.

The 1973 sketches hold up in 2005. They're still funny — and politically daring before comedians learned to be politically correct. The material not only holds up, it holds its own with some of the best new material. If tested for Cook and Moore's comedy DNA, most of America's cutting-edge comedy troupes from the last decade (The State, The Upright Citizen's Brigade) would come up positive.

But who's keeping score? □

Art speak

The tale of the blot and the diagram

Abstract artists create visual music with no lyrics



The mind's net of light cast into a sea of stars — Joan Moment's "Luminous Net" Marty Fugate

'Paintings in Mixed Media: Tom Grabosky, Tremain Smith and Joan Moment' • Allyn Gallup
Contemporary Art through July 30

Rod Stewart was wrong. "Every picture tells a story" is no truer than: "All songs have words." Abstract painters are visual musicians who skip the lyrics. This exhibit features three of them.

Grabosky, Smith and Moment make abstract art. As Alastair Cooke observed, that's another way of saying their paintings are either blots or diagrams or some combination of the two. Cooke was thinking about modern artists. (Jackson Pollock: blot. Mondrian: diagram.) But the principle still applies to these post-modernists. They all play with the tension between blotty chaos and diagrammatic order.

Similarity doesn't mean sameness. You won't mistake a Smith painting for a Moment anymore than you'd mistake Strauss' "Blue Danube Waltz" for Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Shuckin' Sugar Blues" because they're both in 4/4 time. Grids and blobs are just raw material. Starting with the same basic stuff, these visual musicians make wildly different songs. Each gives a different weight to order and chaos in their art, a different sense of color, proportion and form. There's even a different optimal viewing distance for each their paintings.

Joan Moment's paintings can be appreciated from across the room. The reason it works from far away? Her art has the clarity of good maps. Her heart is in the diagram; you see reflections of atomic models, star charts and flow charts in her paintings. Her colors are the bright blues and yellows that work in the

visual communication of information. Her art's diagrammatic quality feels like a real fascination, not an intellectual point she's trying to prove. Moment's inner professor isn't feeding you comments about Cartesian duality and Western Man. Once upon a time, she looked at the unintentional art in the patterns of things such as star charts and circuit diagrams and thought, "That's really cool." In her art, she strips the diagrams of what they're referring to, leaving nothing but visual coolness. But that's just a hunch. Whatever she's thinking, her art is cool to look at.

In this exhibit, you can look at several paintings from Moment's constellation series. Her acrylic-on-paper "Big Dipper" shows a series of circles against a blank background. The circles are all perfect circles — and they're all the same size, as if they've been stamped, not painted by hand. As a star chart, it's not the greatest. Moment's more interested in the weird perfection of the circle, and how that unnatural perfection looks when it's repeated in a pattern.

If Moment's art can be appreciated at a distance, Tremain Smith's canvases are best seen from a foot or so away — close enough for your eye to dive into them.

Where does Smith stand on the blot-diagram divide? She subdivides her paintings in a linear mesh, à la Mondrian. But she's messier — a Mondrian who doesn't color inside the lines. What really seems to interest her is the mess of chaotic paint boiling *inside* the linear furrows. Put Smith down firmly in the blot camp.

That's easy to say, though it doesn't say enough. Smith's paintings defy quick examination. There's a lot going on in them — layers and layers of chaotic energy. (Actually, layers of pigmented wax create with the encaustic painting technique.) Smith's colors are dark; it takes time to see the subtle distinctions. A glance won't get you through those layers; meditation will.

Look long and hard enough and you start

to see more. A painting like "Passage Through" looks like a furrowed field seen from an airplane at first. Then you're reminded of the Nazca lines in Peru. You see a simple pattern of lines. Then the lines seem to connect you to something else — a "passage through" to something unmapped.

Tom Grabosky's paintings have images of real stuff in them — the only art in this exhibit that does. Real but not realistic. He's incorporated digital photographs, but collaged and manipulated them beyond recognition. Where Moment gives you maps without territories, Grabosky show you landscapes without making scenes.

A lack of recognition sparks cognition. In a painting like "Gaviota Beach," there's nothing to point to — "Ah! *There's the old tree. There's that rock.*" You're left with the texture and form of trees, rocks, sky and water. What you see is objective data, as real as the contours of things the eye always looks for. What you see is data usually missed because the eye stops looking when it finds what it thinks is important — the identifiable things. When the things are out of the way, you can see what you've missed. Grabosky takes away the sun so you can see the stars.

Blot or diagram? As Cooke had said, the chaos of abstract art uses the trick of the Rorschach blot. External chaos shows the chaos inside the mind: Freud's Id, the shaman's mana, or the bogeyman under the bed. The diagram employs a different trick. It's the order the mind creates on the world outside. Grabosky gives you order. No monsters lurk in his pastiche landscapes. His hues are dark, but his meaning is plain as day. Grabosky's paintings are diagrams of what not to miss on your next walk. On top of that, they're unmistakably *paintings*, like all the paintings here.

Seeing these paintings makes you appreciate what an amazing thing a painting is. *This* canvas hanging on *that* wall and nowhere else. Visual musicians creating a visual jam session for just one room.

Enjoy it while you can. □



by Marty
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